

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present invention extends to methods, systems, computer program products, and data structures for efficiently storing and accessing electronic messages. Generally, electronic messages are created and transformed in accordance with an electronic message schema hierarchy. Electronic messages can be created according to a general message schema that defines a format for data fields that are common to all types of electronic messages (e.g. electronic mail, instant message, fax message). Electronic messages can also be extended according to message extension schemas that define formats for adding protocol specific and/or or application specific data fields to an electronic message. Data fields added in accordance with message extension schemas can differ between electronic messages types. Having some commonly defined fields and other differently defined fields promotes efficient storage and access of electronic messages, while also facilitating message compatibility with existing message protocols and message applications.

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